There once was a boy who lived in a quiet village. His parents died when he was in the first standard in a fire accident and he learnt to fend for himself rather quickly. He ran away from his aunt's house on his eighth birthday and sold his stationery to survive for a couple of days. It did not take him much effort to sell the little stationery that he had to his peers. Now that his little pencils and erasers were gone, he didn't know what else could get him such quick money. The erasers especially had been a hit since the boys his age found them rather convenient to refine their catapulting skills. Now that they were out of stock, the boy wondered what else he could sell. That night, he sneaked into his aunt's house and found a box of bangles. The adults were so much easier than their kids. The women in the village swooned over his shiny stock of bangles. With the pride of a boy who had just sold half a box of bangles with no knowledge of profit and loss, he picked the courage to face his aunt and went home. From that day, with the support of his aunt, he began his entrepreneurial hustle. The boy stopped going to school just as he passed the eighth standard with flying colours. He made enough money to make ends meet and that gave him all the satisfaction he needed.

It was the fact that he had never expected people to be so naïve. This led to this burning passion in him. He would sell just about anything and people would buy at all prices. His assortment of customers was as unique as any others. Some were reluctant, some were benevolent, and others were… artless. His prices were unheard of in any other corner of the tiny village, yet the crowd around his little card was the biggest. He was like a little magician. He was the best at what he did.

From combs to phone cases, the boy turned twenty-five vending such items, never getting tired of the quick results such gullible people gave him. But his aunt sat in a corner, watching others his age escaping the dirty gullies of the village as they settled in other cities with jobs. It wasn't that she never tried to convince him to study or simply get out of this vicious cycle of selling articles that barely fetched him a thing apart from the very basics that they required to survive. He wouldn't even try to make it something bigger or change his way of doing 'business.' The boy was addicted to the process. Plastic combs now seemed cursed to his poor aunt as he mindlessly continued to sell them to the same old set of folks.

Then do we, as people of the common public, represent the boy or his customers? We see that the boy who chased the little rush he got every time he received the smallest rewards remained the boy selling people combs and glass bangles when he was the most capable and independent child. He did not intend to pursue anything because of some easy, added dopamine. On the other hand, the only thing we know about the customers is their consistent ingenuousness.

An app like Instagram has the power to bring out these characteristics in all of us exponentially. Even if that doesn't sound new, the coming chapters are to open your eyes as you'll see what 'social media' is. Starting with the basics, what is social media? The Oxford Dictionary defines social media as **websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking.**

Then let us look at some basic statistics. 62.3% of the world makes use of social media. That is more than half of the world. From 4.72 billion in January 2023 to 5.04 billion in January 2024, the population using social

media only continues to grow (source: Smart Insights Digital Marketing). Unsurprisingly, the age group mostly involved with social media is that of ages 15 to 24.

The average time spent by a person on social media applications is close to two hours and twenty minutes a day. Statistics also state that one out of every four people gets distracted by social media during workdays. Something that people often do not acknowledge is

The power social media carries is nearly immeasurable. The most basic and common uses we see include acting as a platform to allow people to socialize as well as providing tools for businesses and organizations to connect with their audience and further engage with customers. Digital marketing too has grown tremendously thanks to the progression of social media. When we put such uses on a global level, we find ourselves in awe at the kind of capacity social media holds as well as its incredible accomplishments in the past years. It's in this extensive power that we find the human race getting lost. Social media is as powerful as it gets today and it is rather scary to see its effect on humans.

Algorithms

Social media is designed in one of the smartest ways which makes it so fascinating. This is a result of the work these apps' developers put in. For that, let us take a peek at their history taking the example of one of the most widely used platforms- Facebook.

'The Facebook' was launched on February 4, 2004. It was the work of Mark Zuckerberg along with his roommate Eduardo Saverin, and other Harvard University students, particularly Andrew McCollum, Dustin Moskovitz, and Chris Hughes. What started as a tight addition after each of the co-founders had invested $1,000 in the website for an online 'face book' or a student directory featuring photos and basic information, meant for its easy accessibility, expanded from the university to other colleges in the Boston area before being available to most American and Canadian universities and corporations is now available worldwide to anyone above the age of thirteen and is used by over 2.96 billion people actively.

Then what caused something that started as a student directory to be used by literal *billions* today? It's an assortment of the usual elements that are entangled to form this sort of power. Let's start with what we see as soon as we open any social media site or application- algorithms. **A social media algorithm is a set of rules and calculations used by**

social media platforms to prioritize the content that users see in their feed. Their most actively watched content, preferences, dislikes, and more are taken into account to create a personalized algorithm for every user. With the increase in human interactions via social media platforms, a lot of what was for the sake of entertainment is now what people associate with reality. What appears on these algorithms is often misinformation. They bring us controversial content that automatically keeps us engaged. This engagement is crucial and keeps us away from reality/true information. This content is also based on individual preference so that users remain in their comfort zone and feel satisfied while craving more.

Even in the case of Facebook, the algorithm contains controversial or 'sensational' posts that tend to elicit strong emotional reactions, which can be expressed through a variety of reactions beyond the Like, such as 'Love,' 'Wow,' 'Sad' and 'Angry' (source: freedom.to).

We can clearly understand the progressive results of each addition by taking a glimpse at the timeline of Facebook's algorithm advancement. After its commencement in 2004, newsfeed popped up in 2006. The esteemed 'Like' came in 2007, followed by the invention of a 'sorting order' (i.e., the algorithm) for the newsfeed. The 'See First' feature was introduced in 2015 and the algorithm made headway in 2016 with prioritization of content based on the amount of time a user spent on it. 'Reactions' were weighted more than 'Likes' in 2017 and in 2018, posts were prioritized according to the number of comments received. The 'Why am I seeing this post' tool came in 2019, and the progress continues upward.

It is truly remarkable to see how social media algorithms work. But the purpose of these pieces of code is not really targeted toward the misery of people. They mainly serve as filters- they offer content that the user is interested in and shun anything else. Then why is entering 'YouTube' on the search bar and looking at the homepage the turning point for, let's say, the average teenage population's productive day?

It all boils down to a matter of preference. YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook are all platforms individuals use. They all call for individualism. For those who love aesthetics, their content is filled with beauty-related content and lifestyle-related posts/videos often pop up too.

Understanding this concept is simple. It is predominantly due to us forgetting to draw a line between computers and humans. Algorithms grasp patterns and patterns only, whereas we have lives. Not everything is predictable and progress is required. We cannot limit our physical and mental needs to a certain genre. We progress only when we elude certain patterns after certain periods. The pattern that these pages show prevents the same. So many of us rely on the same biased patterns that the

algorithm represents and wonder why the world looks so negative or functions so aberrantly. This gets us *into* it. This is how we step into the world of social media. This is how videos get views and likes. It is like a warm welcome. And as we get drawn into this, we know what follows. Addiction. More of that is to come in the next chapter.

Have you ever noticed when you start prioritizing good content like study tips or work tips on YouTube after having gone through loads of content that actually brings you no substantial knowledge, it takes so much longer for your algorithm to be filled with those videos? And when it's the other way around, the unproductive content fills your algorithm *so* quickly. This is mainly because in today's world of social media with everyone posting everything, the amount of good content, even if not by a significant number, is lesser than the nugatory content.

Biased algorithms, the kind most of us see, distort a user's view of reality and other perceptions and encourage polarization, stereotyping, or any sort of negative conceptions/beliefs. It can also lead to exposure to harmful content and, as mentioned before, the spread and interpretation of misinformation. (source: AIContentfy)

Is there a solution to this? It's too early to find out. All we know for now is that social media algorithms can be like cheese in a trap. It lures us into what has become an enormous web for *so many* of us, which seems impossible to escape. Yet.

Views, Likes, and Comments

A question from the previous chapter remains only half answered- do we, as people of the common public, represent the boy or his customers? We agreed that we represent both. But how? Why?

From the story, we can clearly make out that the boy represents addiction. And as people who get so easily entangled in social media algorithms, the dopamine from likes, and the endless entertainment/aesthetics/ "knowledge" it has to provide, we seem to be no different from the customers either. This chapter brings these two concepts together. This is because both are things originating from a commonplace- dopamine.

That's a word we have all heard before. But what does it really mean? What makes this 'dopamine' so impactful on our lives?

Dopamine is a neurotransmitter, something that sends chemical signals from one neuron to another. It is responsible for pleasure, focus, desire and so many other things that make one human. It is a feel-good hormone. But here's the catch- in today's world, it is so simple to imbalance one's dopamine while dopamine is also something that can destroy if too much or too little.

Learning, sleeping, pain processing, moving, and so much more are affected by dopamine.

It's hard to pinpoint a single cause of mental health disorders and challenges. But they're often linked to too much or too little dopamine in different parts of the brain. (source: WebMD)

For example, a lot of people facing obesity go through something beyond what we see. Many of them are unable to release enough feel-good hormones like dopamine or serotonin. This does not allow them to feel satisfied as quickly as it might for those with a normal release of dopamine.

Another thing that seems to come hand in hand with dopamine is addiction. Substances like drugs, caffeine, sugar, and social media spike dopamine levels, making one feel extreme pleasure. But the bigger issue is the feeling that comes after this high passes. It is not difficult to imagine that that pleasure seems mandatory once the low resumes. Just like that, we learn to depend more and more on dopamine and things that don't bring us the same dopamine seem to be of no use.

Something to be aware of is that excess dopamine is like getting too much of something too good. When we associate addiction with dopamine, we need to keep in mind that it is behavioural addiction like gambling, getting too hooked on work, constant use of social media, and drinking.

This also means that things like drug addiction are not fully caused by dopamine boosts though it remains one of many factors.

Now, who doesn't like compliments? A simple 'You look good today' or 'You're so good at your work' can light up the worst of our days. That is how simple the mechanism of 'likes' is. These likes make us feel *so good* that it makes us vulnerable. We want more. We *need* more. Even a high number of views can act as a digital affirmation.

This is the same dopamine that wrote the rest of the boy's life. Something as simple/abstract as this held the power to put him in a place that he did not even think about getting out of.

Something we see, especially post-COVID-19, is the sharp increase in the number of teen active social media users.

Social media is a rather transparent coping mechanism. Psychological research around this area has risen since the pandemic and is still on a seemingly ceaseless journey.

To understand the basics of some of this research and its results, we will first look into how social media works as a coping mechanism.

Social media works in three broad ways as a coping mechanism.

1) **Socioemotional coping-** This includes online interactions and participation in online groups and activities. These groups/activities are used to destress and decrease negativity.
2) **Problem-focused coping-** Rita always missed the best part of her new class- the beginning. To solve this problem, she started driving to the class earlier to get there on time. This is an example of a problem-focused solution. Problem-focused coping is very similar. People with a high fear of something tend to seek ways to avoid a situation with that certain something being an issue. We can infer from this that this coping usually deals with collecting information. Do you remember the last time you started searching about something at information just never seemed to stop coming your way? Do you also remember how all the information, though a lot of it was simply repeated over and over again, was something you found so unnecessarily important? That right there is also problem-focused coping.
3) **Mental Disengagement-** This type of coping doesn't really occur to you that what you are doing can be emotional impulsiveness unless you try to understand where that craving for social media is coming from. Just recall the last time you forgot about quite literally everything as you sat and scrolled your Instagram or Pinterest page. It never ends. This includes hints from the previous chapter as we know these algorithms are built *so* effectively. This is something seen more often among teenagers. [source: frontiers in Psychology (PubMed Central)]

As this began with the increase in teen users, let us dive deeper into the last type. Mental disengagement is characterised by using the Internet to mentally distract oneself from the stress one is facing (Kırcaburun and Griffiths, 2019; Khoo and Yang, 2021). [source: frontiers in Psychology (PubMed Central)]

In the face of falling grades, a plummeting relationship or a tense home environment, a phone in hand can seem like heaven. That justifies this entire concept. As the gloom takes over most teens from the harsh or even just the growing realities of life, this dose of dopamine seems impossible to refuse. Mental disengagement can, in fact, be a quick

temporary way of releasing stress. But that 'temporary' part is sticky. It requires huge amounts of consciousness and mental strength to be able to put that phone down when it's time to study or work. Apart from not being able to finish your work, a longer period of mental disengagement can make you delusional. It can be difficult to understand that the real world and the online one are not even remotely close. It can consume you. It makes you vulnerable and even naïve. That completes the story of the gullible customers. They didn't care about how pricey the boy was. His charm worked on them the same way endless social media content does. It might be wholesome, scandalous, spicy, or simply all over the play. It's right up your alley.

Some of us might have once been bored before opening Instagram. And then it never stopped. It just goes on and on. This is the mind in the comfort zone. We can unconsciously feel the need to mentally disengage just like that.

The next time you think you'll take a break by scrolling through Instagram, remember that that is only going to drain you further.

Due to all the causes, we have read till now, an estimated 210 million people are addicted to social media.

But, as humans, how do we make it a point to get out of this trap? We are all aware that getting our hands off our phones can be one of the most difficult things in the world. The answer may seem simple, but it's easier said than done.

Again, to get a better and more impactful idea of the solutions, we must dive even deeper into this subject.

Let's have a quick recap before moving on to the next chapter.

- Social Media is a powerful tool that enables users to create and share content or to participate in social networking. It has its pros and cons. (The first part of this book mainly deals with its cons.)
- Social media is designed in one of the smartest ways which makes it so fascinating. It is used by over a whopping 5.04 billion (active) users for networking, digital marketing, and many other purposes.
- A social media algorithm is a set of rules and calculations used by social media platforms to prioritize the content that users see in their feed. It is the first thing that we see as soon as we open a social media app.
- Social media algorithms are designed in a way to keep users in a comfort zone while craving for more. It shows us what we want to see by filtering content based on our usage and preferences in the past.
- Biased algorithms, the kind most of us see, distort a user's view of reality and other perceptions and encourage polarization, stereotyping, or any sort of negative conceptions/beliefs. It can also lead to exposure to harmful content and the spread and interpretation of misinformation.

- Dopamine is a neurotransmitter responsible for pleasure, focus, desire and other human emotions. It is a feel-good hormone.
- Too much or too little dopamine can lead to mental and sometimes physical health issues. Things like alcohol, social media, and gaming can release a high amount of dopamine, causing one to feel short-term happiness or make one high. Just as the high crashes and the low comes back, we start to crave that pleasure again and hence, the cycle never ends. This is how dopamine causes behavioural addiction.
- Likes and views are digital affirmations that can spike up dopamine.
- Many people, especially teens, can get addicted to social media by trying to mentally disengage. This is a type of coping mechanism that can be temporarily beneficial. But after a certain limit, they can get too absorbed in it which leads to delusional thinking.
- Some other types of coping are socioemotional coping and problem-focused coping.

Influencers

Once upon a time, in a quiet little forest lived many birds and animals harmoniously. Dawn was always welcomed by the mellifluous songs of all kinds of birds and the rest of the day would fly by in the same peaceful and beautiful manner. But among all the beautiful passing seasons, one was much awaited by all animals and hardly a bird. Other than the nightingale, of course. It outshone every other flying creature in the forest. The monsoon season was meant just for a single nightingale, who decided to give the public a display of her voice only once a month. But spring was different. It was either every morning or evening that this bird sang to the dazed citizens of the forest. A continuous month of its minstrelsy meant utter bliss to all creatures in the forest. Other than the birds. They were jealous but could only sulk to themselves.

One fine day, the nightingale had an idea. What if the sweet songs she brought to the forest came with a fee? She could do wonders with whatever she collected. She might eventually have the other birds forgotten. Oh! The thought made her ecstatic.

And so, the bird who started to find it a little difficult to fly with the weight of her pride on her back, soon collected a handsome amount from nearly every creature in the forest. Though some were a little irked by the sudden spending they had to do, they couldn't miss a chance to listen to her voice as the show was held only in a private corner of the forest. And the season was coming to an end. Who could refuse such an opportunity?

Days passed as the show got shorter while the fee rapidly grew. At some point, the bird herself felt a pang of guilt for getting her claws in this business. But she convinced herself that all she was doing was pure business. Money did not come after her. She had to go after it. It was only a natural part of life.

But there came a day when a brave sheep stood up from the audience and said to the nightingale, "Oh lady! Your voice is sweeter than what we can ask for. But what do I get for all the money I pay for this show? I cannot stop paying for this show and listening to you every day even though my pocket is crying. I barely have enough for myself. For the money you give me, I give you so many things. I give you milk and grass. I give you sticks and stones. I give you my wool that keeps you warm. Tell me, what does this bill give me?"

The nightingale, slightly impressed by the sheep, replied, "My dear friend, I thank you for finding my voice worthy of your money. While you also said you do not see why your money is worth this show, I believe you are confused. I bring you happiness. I bring you comfort. I present to you, young man, my voice."

The audience clapped for her response. The nightingale smiled as she thought of all the praise and money the crowd threw at her. Oh, the kind of gift an eloquent tongue and a throat made. It was everything she needed.

This story seems similar to the one in the first chapter. A major difference we can see is the theme of addiction being absent here; instead, the artlessness, previously of the customers, is rather more prominent. All the creatures of the forest, who were awe-struck by the nightingale's, voice represent… us.

Though the nightingale was talented, she saw her image literally mould the minds of the forest's population and eventually learnt that she had the privilege to use that to her advantage. Since she had already played the cards right, she had the freedom to reduce the duration of the show while increasing the fee. Though no one noticed the change due to the idea of the nightingale's voice already and how magnificent it was, the weirdness of the lie they were all caught in, somehow surfaced in the form of the sheep's question. The nightingale being an eloquent orator herself, convinced the sheep that her show was worth every penny for the joy it gave. Though her voice was indeed special, she knew that the money she collected was a consequence of her swindling.

In the context of social media, where does this story fit? Perhaps everywhere. What does social media consist of? It's only running because people are using it. Then why are people using it? We saw purposes such as connecting and digital marketing in the previous chapter. But some people become the basis of this entire concept. Apart from connecting with friends privately, there is something more to these social media apps. What fills those algorithms are not your friend's messages. It is mainly content brought to you by **influencers**.

Now, that is a word we all seem to be familiar with. Influencer marketing is a form of social media marketing involving endorsements and product placement from influencers, people and organizations who have a purported expert level of knowledge or social influence in their field. Let's break that down.

To start, let us take a glimpse at digital marketing. Digital marketing is a form of marketing where businesses use online platforms to advertise products and/or gain presence as businesses/brands. While influencer marketing is similar, we see that over here, the focus is majorly on the person who is advertising certain brands on screen. Now, why is this comparatively more effective? It's because of who that influencer is and the image they carry. When a person is involved in what is shown on the

screen, people tend to find the entire thing more relatable. The product might seem more aesthetic due to the person using it. And so many other times, we buy things only because a celebrity/influencer you like uses/markets it.

On average, businesses earn $5.78 for every dollar they spend on influencer marketing. That should give you a rough idea of the strength of influencer marketing. It is a cost-effective and promising type of marketing.

We also see influencers who are not involved in product placement; instead, they advocate lifestyle, aesthetics, art, etc. These are content creators. We will further dive into the details of the types of influencers later in this chapter.

Influencers are ideally people with expertise in a specific niche. Their purpose is to establish and advocate this to their followers and build a connection. Building this "connection" leads to a stronger and larger base of followers which is where the income lies. It is a good and growing form of business.

When it comes to customer service, it is important to maintain a good relationship with customers. The thing with influencing and content creation is that there is little room left for this as these customers, aka followers, find a much stronger connection with these influencers- ideally the ones providing the service. But that does not mean that influencers don't work for it. Maintaining good content for viewers and/or followers to remain satisfied is a lot of work.

Then how exactly do these people do it? How do they get people so attached? There are a lot of factors that tie together for them to achieve such an effect.

Firstly, the things that influencers post are very centred on their specific niche/theme. For example, fashion influencers look perfect from head to toe because that is their job. Many of us think that some expensive fit that they show is the new norm and that we are somehow less worthy than them because we do not wear the same clothes. That might sound cliche, but knowingly or unknowingly, we think like that. We tend to believe that we don't fit into standards that, in reality, don't exist.

An extension of the same is the process of editing. Today, this is becoming more and more exposed. What we see is not everything. Filters and multiple takes result in the product that we get to see. These content creators might look immaculate. Their aesthetics seem to be unearthly. But most of it is a result of the perfect lighting, make-up, filters, and editing. There are so many instances where these people say something as if it just slipped off their tongue or act clumsy, but that is often done to make us feel as if they are one of us too. It makes things "relatable". They

also might seem extremely tidy and organized, both mentally and physically, on camera while we are not aware of how the rest of their space and real lives might be. They might sound like the sweetest people to us but that might not be true too. It is sometimes scary to think about how contradictory some of their lives can be. And just like that, the products of this entire process seem to be normal. And when we don't seem as "perfect" as these influencers, we deem ourselves below some standards that our minds make for ourselves. Speak of illusions. This is an exponential one.

This can also make their lives exponentially difficult. We might think that some of them with the best cars and houses are living the lives of their dreams, but maintaining a certain image can also get difficult. This is especially the case when they work under companies/brands that don't treat them well and pressure them to work under extreme circumstances. To maintain aesthetics, models and other social media influencers can grow anorexic and get other mental disorders under the pressure of having to look or work in a certain way. This negative effect on their mental health gradually affects them physically too.

Another thing that has recently come to light is the act of buying followers. This is, unfortunately, becoming increasingly common. Influencers or companies some of them work under can buy instant follows for rates cheaper than you might think. This puts them on a pedestal as influencers.

All of this tells us that social media is anything but transparent. Beware. There is so much happening that we are not aware of.

But here is another important thing. Though everything we spoke about is prevalent, social media is also a platform that spreads positivity. Certain content creators do post good content that can be extremely useful in life. Some people do post content that is unfiltered and can impact us in the right ways. The problem is that there are times when we cannot truly distinguish between things that are filtered and unfiltered. Valuable content on social media is indeed valuable for it is not the most common. If you are someone who takes the right inspiration, information, and habits from social media, you can generously pat yourself on the back. It is not the easiest task to _increase_ productivity by using something that is making most of the population unproductive.

To give you a broader understanding of influencers, here is some information on some of the most popular influencer types based on their content.

1) Fashion

Fashion influencers show people how to dress their best and provide tips and tricks on dressing up. They can advertise or simply recommend

clothes and accessories. They can either be ambassadors/models for small or luxury brands, or they can be content creators who share their unique sense of fashion and wardrobe hacks. They can also be a part of the fashion industry, hence they share their fashion knowledge on these platforms. It is important to note that these aesthetics do not define societal norms and that it is okay to not be able to wear certain clothes. A lot of cannot afford or look the same in certain clothes and that is completely okay.

2) Beauty

Beauty influencers usually recommend make-up, skincare, and hair care products. They share a lot about cosmetics and beauty hacks. They are usually ambassadors of/sponsored by cosmetic brands. You can also see hair stylists, aestheticians, and make-up artists posting beauty content. Something to remember here is that this content involves a *lot* of filters so beware and don't fall prey to unrealistic standards set by some of these creators. But otherwise, this, like the previous type, can involve a lot of creativity and fun.

3) Health
- *Health & Wellness*

These influencers are experts in nutrition, medicines, mental health and other aspect of our overall health. They give product recommendations, diets, and other wellness tips. This can be very valuable content as long as the person giving this advice or showing this kind of content is a certified practician. Otherwise, be careful while watching this content. Also, do not self-diagnose if there is a serious issue. It is best recommended to visit a doctor even if these tips are safe and valid.

- *Sports & Fitness*

This can involve lifestyle, gym workouts, at-home workouts, diets, weight loss, mental health, etc. These influencers are growing increasingly popular due to today's standards of aesthetics as well as the growing rate of health issues. They provide advice, work out routines, product recommendations, etc. They can be fitness coaches or simply content creators. Again, it is important to note that people cannot work out for three days or take one pill and achieve their dream bodies. It requires work and genes play an important role too.

4) Lifestyle

The content lifestyle influencers show is usually a mix of the above content. It involves lifestyle routines (which can include workouts and skincare routines), organization tips, diets, fashion choices, and their life in general. Followers usually draw inspiration from such content creators

to make better choices. While it can be comforting and seem holistic, this content can be overly romanticized and impractical. So, it is important to find a balance if you are also seeking ideas/inspiration from these influencers.

5) Travel

Travel influencers show popular places, tourist attractions, travel-related products, hotels to stay at, etc. They share tips to achieve travel-related goals and manage expenses while doing so.

6) Dating

Dating influencers share dating advice and tips for those in relationships. While this may be useful to some, the kind of content they post can pressure younger people who might not be in a relationship for various reasons. They can also make it seem as if people have to go about relationships in a certain way, which is not true.

It's so nice, isn't it? These sweet new beginnings, comfort and support that influencers bring to us. The nightingale too brought joy and comfort. Only if it was all real...

To conclude this chapter, influencers play a key role in the entire functioning of today's social media. They have their pros and cons. It is important to be aware that not everything/everyone is true/honest. That being said, many influencers post informative (and true) and productive content. We must learn to steer ourselves through this assortment of influencers to remain productive while using social media.

Addiction

Now that we have covered three major elements of social media- social media algorithms, views, likes and comments, and influencers- let us step toward answering the questions left in the previous chapters.

Another experiment conducted more than once before Corona, included the correlation between quitting social media and quitting... cigarettes.

Yes, quitting social media is said to be harder than quitting cigarettes. In fact, people have even used social media *to quit* smoking (by staying on

online platforms that helped them keep a check on themselves and others while tackling the problem as not individuals, but as a group).

Social media can be right in your hand. You don't need to keep buying packs or bottles of it. It stays on that phone forever. That is unless you decide to delete it.

Let's first tackle algorithms. Beating social media algorithms can be quite a task. It does not involve technicality but bucketloads of mental strength. It requires time. Ignore it for a few weeks or maybe even a month or two. If you want better, useful, productive, and personal content, don't mindlessly scroll through the home page. In this period, the only way of accessing the right content is through the search bar. The algorithm must remain inexistent to you. It is essential not to touch the unproductive content previously consumed because that can affect the course of this change though it is okay if you slip once or twice. Just make sure you don't do it again. Let new and useful algorithms be a driving force. You know it takes only around 30 days for this process to get over. Once that period is over, you will have done a real favour to yourself by reviving a much more suitable and agreeable social media algorithm. This is half the battle won as most temptations will then be gone.

This aspect of the next element is another task that can be a serious struggle but it's worth it. We are speaking dopamine. When you pursue activities that continually spike your dopamine, your dopamine baseline eventually drops and it takes more and more of that same pleasurable activity to make you feel good again. At some point, your baseline drops so low that only that specific activity brings you pleasure and nothing else in the world does. The worst thing that can happen after this case of addiction is that your baseline is so low that that activity doesn't help make you feel good anymore. With nothing as a pleasure in life, you then fall into a severe state of depression.

Something called a "dopamine detox" has been gaining popularity online. Now, how does this work?

We all enjoy rewards. Today, everyone is aware that the award system always works, be it with others or yourself. Activities like scrolling, eating sugar, and smoking produce dopamine, which acts as a reward. It is the pleasure you get in turn to engage in these activities. The dopamine detox or dopamine fasting is a process in which those willing to detach themselves from addictive activities/pleasures, avoid it for a set amount of time to get used to the absence of this. This is the most straightforward method of battling addiction. It is key to remember this can be one of the most challenging and rewarding tasks you might ever do.

Now that we have dealt with a major part of the problem, let us look at dealing with its core, its root cause. What kind of depth is this addiction coming from?

Let us look at a study. Data was collected from 641 quarantined citizens through a two-wave survey conducted in China during government-mandated lockdowns [source: frontiers in Psychology (PubMed Central)]. The results showed that perceived COVID-19 stress was related to the intensity of social media use for problem-focused coping, socioemotional coping, and mental disengagement. In addition, individuals' psychological adjustment was positively associated with social media use for socioemotional coping and mental disengagement while negatively related to problem-focused coping. Age was also found to be a moderator of the relationship between socioemotional coping and psychological adjustment. There was a clear division among different age groups when it came to the usage of social media for different kinds of coping.

Diving even deeper into this, let us break down each coping method mentioned above. Adverse childhood experiences (trauma, neglect, abuse, etc.), traumatic events like natural disasters, accidents and violence, and specific family dynamics lead to socioemotional disorders in people and the need to cope with them. This is especially prevalent among teens.

Similar traumatic events or even slightly difficult tasks are often only substances lacing tough blocks of fear, ego, and uncertainty. This is the truth behind mental disengagement with social media.

When it comes to problem-focused coping, the root is not as specific. Anxiety can be one reason for feeling the constant need to consume certain information on social media. Problem-focused coping can also come from the same place as mental disengagement.

The deeper issues lead to a lack of motivation and happiness and can lead to depression. To counter this, we again circle back to the dopamine situation. That sums up the causes of social media addiction.

Let's have a quick recap before moving on to the next chapter.

- Influencer marketing is a form of social media marketing involving endorsements and product placement from influencers, people and organizations who have a purported expert level of knowledge or social influence in their field.
- Influencer marketing is similar to digital marketing, but its main focus is on the person who is advertising certain brands on screen.
- On average, businesses earn $5.78 for every dollar they spend on influencer marketing. That should give you a rough idea of the strength of influencer marketing. It is a cost-effective and promising type of marketing.
- Influencing is heavily based on building a good connection with followers.

- They post content specific to a niche. These posts lead to people believing that they don't fit into standards that, in reality, don't exist.
- It is important to be aware that not everything/everyone is true/honest online. That being said, many influencers post informative (and true) and productive content. We must learn to steer ourselves through this assortment of influencers to remain productive while using social media.
- Quitting social media is said to be harder than quitting cigarettes.
- To see positive changes in the way your algorithm looks, use only the spacebar to consume useful content and do not get swayed by unproductive content. The transition period is about 30 days long.
- Dopamine issues are a result of more deep-seated problems that urge people to use social media to cope with them.
- A dopamine detox/fast is the most effective method of dealing with this problem.

Solutions

There is one word you might be familiar with that you have not come across yet in the text. The fear of missing out(FOMO) is a concept that is quite intriguing. When do you develop the strongest sense of missing out? Is it when you start using social media or when you get addicted to it? What comes in between these two phases? I believe it is very subjective. The fear of missing out has a subtle relationship with dopamine. Doesn't satisfying that curiosity give you some pleasure? That is the dopamine. But dopamine does not play a major role here. The fear of missing out comes from so many places. It can be the underconfidence and anxiety that addiction to social media has caused. It can also be addiction itself. One can define FOMO in numerous ways. Irrespective of what FOMO means to you, it remains a guiding factor, entailing every bit of one's journey through social media addiction.

It takes true strength to resist this urge. Would you choose to study for a test over running to a party that you aren't allowed to be at? An honest 'yes' will convince me that you do not require this text. An average (honest) person will agree with the latter. Why? FOMO.

Getting over FOMO will not just mend your relationship with social media but with life itself. Extreme FOMO can lead to anxiety and other problems.

It is funny how FOMO does not let you get over your social media addiction while the fastest way of getting over FOMO is letting go of social media. FOMO is said to majorly start from social media and unrealistic content. Many books on FOMO are truly insightful and worth reading like

'The Subtle Art of Not Giving a F**k' by Mark Manson, which speaks of much more substantial things within the subject.

Dopamine fasting is difficult but seems to be the only solution to get rid of one's social media addiction. It takes a kind of strength and courage that not many tasks do. A strong mind, strong ideals, contrarian perspectives and self-confidence are all factors in this journey. It is always in the mind. It's essential to remember that. Stay unique and don't chase goals set up by 99% of the people (that includes influencers). It is you who will make a change for yourself. It is like getting out of a drug den but you are the only sober person. Think about it. This journey can be way simpler than it looks. Again, it's all in the mind.